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Subject: Flint Weekly News Round-up 09/09/16

Bipartisan Flint Aid Bill Has Some Momentum In Congress

By Sara Jerome, Water Online 09/09/16

The U.S. Senate is considering bipartisan legislation that would send more aid to Flint, MI, to address the city's water infrastructure challenges that resulted in a public health crisis. "Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell took the first procedural step towards advancing a \$9.4 billion waterways bill," which contains Flint aid along with unrelated programs, The Hill reported.

U.S. Senate considers water bill including Flint aid

By Melissa Nann Burke, Detroit News 09/08/16 5:58 PM

The U.S. Senate this week has taken up a \$9.4 billion water projects bill that includes emergency funding for updating water infrastructure in Flint and other communities faced with drinking-water contamination. If approved, the bipartisan bill could bring up to \$100 million for Michigan to use in Flint. Genesee County's largest city, which has had lead-contaminated water for at least a year, is currently the only U.S. community that qualifies for this type of aid, but other cities might receive emergency declarations in the coming months and qualify.

\$15M in fed, state funds allows Flint MTA to buy buses, launch workforce program

By Roberto Acosta, MLIVE 09/08/16 5:51 PM

The Mass Transportation Authority in Flint will be able to replace nearly two dozen buses and being a workforce training program after federal and state officials awarded more than \$15 million to the cause. Approximately 20, 40-foot long compressed natural gas buses are set for purchase along with the launch of a workforce development training program in conjunction with Baker College to train mechanics and bus drivers with \$12.8 million from the Federal Transit Administration's Bus and Bus Facilities Project.

U.S. Senate considers Flint funding, but time is short

By Todd Spangler, Detroit Free Press 09/08/16 2:53 PM

Months after Michigan members of Congress began agitating for federal funding to help replace miles of old lead pipes throughout Flint, the U.S. Senate finally appears poised to take up legislation next week that could do just that, though its final passage is far from certain. The Water Resources Development Act of 2016 is a sweeping bill that touches on projects from harbor maintenance to dam construction and includes a series of water-quality measures, including \$100 million for drinking water systems where an emergency has been declared because of high lead levels.

Senate passes bill adding Flint to health fund's focus

By Click On Detroit 09/08/16 12:23 PM

The Flint water crisis could become a focus for a near-\$1.6 billion endowment created through the overhaul of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. The Senate voted 36-1 Thursday for legislation adding "public health emergency" to purposes for which the Michigan Health Endowment Fund can spend money. A law modernizing Blue Cross requires it to contribute

\$1.56 billion over 18 years.

Michigan Senate to Vote on Adding Flint to Health Endowment Fund

By Jesi Munguia, 9 & 10 News 09/08/16 5:10 AM

The Flint water crisis may become the focus of a nearly \$1.6 billion endowment created through the overhaul of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. Thursday, the state Senate will vote on whether or not they can add "public health emergency" to the list of specific reasons the Michigan Health Endowment Fund is allowed to spend money. A 2013 law modernizing Blue Cross requires the organization to contribute \$1.56 billion over 18 years.

Flint to add 33 firefighters with \$3M in federal grant money

By Roberto Acosta, MLIVE 09/07/16 10:47 PM

The numbers among Flint firefighters will grow to levels they were at two years ago following the announcement of more than \$3 million in federal aid for the department. After losing 33 firefighters from February 2014 to February 2016, the city is set to receive \$3.767 million to restore those positions via the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, or SAFER, grant program.

Flint funding up in the air

By Timothy Cama, The Hill 09/07/16 6:00 AM

Federal funding for the drinking water crisis in Flint, Mich., remains unresolved as Congress returns from a seven-week recess. It's been nearly a year since Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R) publicly acknowledged that the water in the city of 100,000 was contaminated with lead, partly due to his administration's decision to switch the city's water source. Congressional Democrats say hundreds of millions of dollars is needed to help Flint deal with the water contamination. While Republicans have listened to those calls, they're hesitant to spend new federal money.

Yes, the Flint water crisis is still going on and Congress must act

By Rep. Dan Kildee, The Hill 09/06/16 5:59am

When I am in Washington, D.C., I am sometimes asked by well-meaning people, "Is the Flint

water crisis still going on?” But in my hometown of Flint, Mich., the water filters and blood tests are constant reminders that this tragedy continues. One of the hardest things about this crisis has been watching Flint’s mothers and fathers cope with their new normal as they strive to ensure their children have safe water to drink, cook and brush their teeth with. But the harshest blow came when a young boy asked, “Can I still be smart after drinking water with lead in it?” It was a heartbreaking question coming from anyone, but particularly from a young child. In truth it is up to us to determine the answer to the question posed by this innocent victim of the Flint crisis. With the proper educational and nutritional support, that boy WILL have all the opportunities we want for any of our children. But it is incumbent on Congress to do its part to make sure Flint has the resources to make that possible.

State says Flint hospital home to nation's largest Legionnaires' outbreak of its kind

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/09/16 2:36 PM

McLaren-Flint is home to the "largest healthcare-associated Legionnaires' outbreak known in the U.S.," the state's chief medical executive says in a new affidavit filed Thursday, Sept. 8, with the Michigan Court of Appeals. Dr. Eden Wells' affidavit, part of a filing with the court by the state Department of Health and Human Services, says 10 of 12 deaths due to Legionella in 2014 and 2015 in Genesee County are associated with McLaren.

McLaren: State health workers ‘covered up’ Flint cases

By Chad Livengood, Detroit News 09/08/16 9:57 AM

Attorneys for McLaren Hospital allege that state health department workers engaged in a “cover-up” of a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease in 2014 and 2015 in Genesee County that is linked to Flint’s water crisis. In a court filing, the Flint hospital is asking the Michigan Court of Appeals to uphold a Genesee County judge’s order barring Michigan Department and Health and Human Services employees from being involved in investigations of new and old cases of Legionnaires’ while a criminal probe remains underway. “Upon further investigation of materials related to the Flint water crisis, McLaren-Flint firmly believes the institution was a victim of numerous crimes and cover-ups by state employees including the MDHHS employees” investigating the bacterial outbreak, McLaren’s attorneys wrote in a legal brief filed Friday.

Health officials report a 7th case of Legionnaires'disease in Genesee County

BY Jiquanda Johnson, MLIVE 09/08/16 12:26 AM

Another Legionnaires' disease case has been reported in Genesee County. McLaren Hospital reported a seventh case of Legionnaires' disease to the Michigan Disease Surveillance System electronic database on Sept. 6, according to a Sept. 7 media release from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. MDHHS said they do not have additional information about the case. The agency is prohibited from "fully investigating" Legionella cases in the county due to a Protective Order.

Flint Hospital Accuses State Health Workers of Covering Up Legionnaires' Disease

By Deadline Detroit 09/07/16 10:21 PM

The media coverage of the Flint water scandal has slowed quite a bit. But this may be reason to crank it up again. Chad Livengood of the Detroit News reports that attorneys for McLaren Flint Hospital allege that state health department workers engaged in a "cover-up" of a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in 2014 and 2015 in Genesee County that is suspected of being linked to Flint's water crisis. In 18 months, the Flint area reported 91 Legionnaire's cases, 12 of which resulted in death.

Hospital attorneys allege cover-up, say 'crimes were committed' in Flint water crisis

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/07/16 1:02 PM

An attorney who specializes in criminal law and who has reviewed files from McLaren-Flint hospital related to the Flint water crisis says "crimes were committed" by state employees against city residents as well the hospital. In a filing with the Michigan Court of Appeals Friday, Sept. 2, McLaren attorneys say the institution was "a victim of numerous crimes and 'cover-ups' by state employees including (workers from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services)" since a Legionnaires' disease outbreak that started in 2014.

7th Case Of Legionnaires' Disease Reported In Genesee County

By CBS Detroit 09/07/16 9:59 PM

The state says another case of Legionnaires' disease has been reported in Genesee County. It's the seventh this year in that county. The Michigan health department says the latest case was reported Tuesday on an electronic database by McLaren Hospital in Flint.

Michigan DEQ to target Flint faucets as lead source

By Matthew Dolan, Detroit Free Press, 09/08/16 7:18 PM

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality will use smaller sampling bottles in Flint's residential lead testing program to highlight the problem of contaminated faucets leaching lead. The announcement follows findings from the University of Michigan published online Thursday. The study warned that home service lines may not be the largest contributor of lead in Flint, despite a major push by the city to replace all of them.

Study: Flint lead contamination goes beyond service pipes

By Matthew Dolan, Detroit Free Press, 09/08/16 1:57 PM

A new report from the University of Michigan found home lead service lines may not be the largest contributor of lead in Flint, despite a major push by the city to replace them all. Large spikes of lead occur in homes with and without lead service lines, according to the study's initial findings released online Thursday.

Mona Hanna-Attisha, EPA and others to provide Flint water update

By Roberto Acosta, MLIVE 09/08/16 11:14 AM

A group including Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, Genesee County Health Department, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are set to provide residents with an update on Flint water. The "Water Update: What You Should Know" event is scheduled from 5 p.m.-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 8 at Flushing High School, 5039 Deland Road, and will include Genesee County Clerk John Gleason and Genesee Health Plan experts.

EPA tells Flint it must test run KWA water for 3 months minimum

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/02/16 5:06 PM

It will take at least three months of test runs practice before the city will be able to distribute water from a new pipeline Flint and Genesee County are building to Lake Huron. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told Flint Mayor Karen Weaver and Michigan Department of

Natural Resources Director Keith Creagh of the timeline in a letter Friday, Sept. 2.

Michigan Civil Rights Commission working on final report on Flint water crisis

By Steve Carmody, Michigan Radio 09/09/16 2:45 PM

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission is getting down to work on a final report on the Flint water crisis. The process began roughly nine months ago when the commission decided to examine what factors may have contributed to the crisis. On Thursday, the commission held its third and final public hearing into allegations that classism and racism were root causes of the city's lead-tainted drinking water.

Officials to hear testimony over discrimination claims surrounding Flint water crisis

By WWMT West Michigan 09/08/16

Thursday, state officials will hear from the public about claims of discrimination and racial bias in the Flint water crisis. This will include personal experiences of those directly impacted and the environmental effects that may have played a role in the crisis. This comes as a Flint Water Task Force gets a lead on several smoking guns they think are behind the crisis. Right now eight state employees, along with one city worker, are criminally charged.

Environmental justice focus of Michigan Civil Rights Commission hearing on Flint water crisis

By Roberto Acosta, MLIVE 09/08/16 11:13 AM

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission is ready to hold its third public hearing in Flint over the city's water crisis after two gatherings earlier this year. The hearing is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 8 at the Northbank Center Grand Ballroom, 432 N. Saginaw St., in downtown Flint and will include testimony from experts on whether environmental justice contributed to the crisis. "In the previous hearings, we have heard the eye-opening personal experiences of Flint residents -- the people directly impacted by this crisis," said Rasha Demashkieh, commission co-chair. "In this hearing, we're looking to individuals well-versed in environmental justice to help us understand both the concept and the role it may have played this crisis."

State civil rights department examines role of race, poverty in Flint water crisis

By NBC 25/FOX 66 09/08/16

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights is taking a closer look at the Flint water crisis and whether race or poverty played a role in government decisions. The department is holding its third and final public hearing in Flint Thursday evening. The committee's goal is to look at different state policies, such as the controversial emergency manager law, and decide if minorities or the poor were represented when decisions were made about their community.

Hearing looks at whether environmental injustice played role in Flint water crisis

By ABC 12 09/08/16

A public hearing was held Thursday about whether environmental injustice played a role in the Flint water crisis. Experts in environmental justice were on hand to share their insight about Michigan's history and the laws created to ensure everyone is treated fairly regardless of their race, income or national origin. An attorney who represents communities similar to Flint was among those who testified about how the Civil Rights Act and Fair Housing Act relates to the Flint Water Crisis. This is the third public hearing the Michigan Department of Civil Rights has held about environmental injustice.

Flint water prosecutors retired state executive mum about possible plea deal

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/08/16 2:46 PM

The former state epidemiologist who prosecutors say told employees to delete emails related to the Flint water crisis isn't commenting on a possible plea deal that could make her a key witness in other criminal cases. Corrinne Miller, retired director of the state Department of Health and Human Services' Bureau of Epidemiology, is scheduled to appear in Genesee District Court next week -- the only one of nine Flint water defendants on the docket that day.

Dispute over court order escalates between state and Flint hospital

By Steve Carmody, Michigan Radio 09/08/16

A dispute between Michigan's governor and attorney general is spilling over into institutions charged with protecting public health. The state Department of Health and Human Services

issued a press release yesterday saying there's a seventh case of Legionnaire's disease in Genesee County. But it added it can't say much more because it's blocked by a court order from learning more.

Flint mayor is concerned dispute over court order may be getting in the way of public health

By Steve Carmody, Michigan Radio 09/08/16

Flint's mayor is concerned the health of her city's residents may be affected by a legal dispute between state agencies and local health institutions. A dispute over a court order has led to sniping between the governor's office, Michigan's Attorney General's office, the state health department, and Flint's McLaren hospital. This week, the state health department announced a seventh case of Legionnaire's disease in Genesee County this year. But it said it couldn't confirm what the Flint hospital was doing in response.

State workers charged with crimes in Flint water crisis get 2017 court dates

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/07/16 5:00 PM

State employees charged with criminal wrongdoing in the Flint water crisis are scheduled to hear evidence against them during preliminary exams -- but not until 2017. Genesee District Judge Jennifer Manley on Wednesday, Sept. 7, set a preliminary examinations for Department of Environmental Quality employees Stephen Busch and Michael Prysby for Jan. 18, the same day as a pre-trial conference for DEQ and Department of Health and Human Services defendants.

Flint water criminal cases get 2017 court dates

By Jacob Carah, Detroit News 09/07/16 3:29 PM

Several current and former state employees facing criminal charges for their alleged roles in the city's water crisis will not face preliminary examinations until 2017, nearly three years from when the city's water problems began. Four of those charged were in 67th District Court on Wednesday for probable cause conferences: Liane Shekter Smith, former head of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Office of Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance, DEQ employee Michael Prysby and Corinne Miller, who retired in April as director of the Bureau of Epidemiology, as well as Flint water utility administrator Michael Glasgow.

Flint water crisis prosecutions moving forward slowly

By Steve Carmody, Michigan Radio 09/07/16

Court hearings into criminal charges in the Flint water crisis will drag on well into 2017. Eight current and former state workers with the departments of Environmental Quality and Health and Human Services face a variety of criminal charges related to Flint's lead-tainted tap water. The defendants are accused of concealing and manipulating evidence, failing to take action to protect the safety of city drinking water, and neglect of duty.

Flint water crisis prosecutors tell Appeals Court more criminal charges expected

By Ron Fonger, MLIVE 09/06/16 4:50 PM

Special prosecutors say they expect additional criminal charges to be filed "against unnamed individuals" in the Flint water crisis. Special prosecutor Todd Flood and Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton made the comment Friday, Sept. 2, in a filing with Michigan Court of Appeals.

Other News and Local Items

Flint water crisis: Unanswered questions remain as one-year mark approaches

By Molly Young, MLIVE 09/09/16 10:11 AM

It was nearly a year ago when a young doctor stood in front of a podium and told people what their government had not. The water in Flint was poison. Unusually high levels of lead had been found in the blood of Flint children following a switch to the Flint River, leaving doctors to wonder just how many had been exposed to potentially irreversible health effects from lead poisoning.

Flint officials appeal county judge's ruling in trash controversy

By Jiquanda Johnson, MLIVE 09/09/16 9:06 AM

Flint Mayor Karen Weaver's administration wants the state Court of Appeals to lift an injunction that prevents the city from using an emergency provision to name a new trash hauler. Weaver has been locked in a battle with the Flint City Council over her efforts to award a \$17.5 million garbage contract to Rizzo Environmental Services. City Council has balked at the move, arguing that Rizzo is not the best-suited company for the job.

Panelists discuss dangers of lead during free Flint water crisis event

By Jiquanda Johnson, MLIVE 09/08/16 11:06 PM

Health officials continue to meet with Flint area residents to help provide information and answer questions about Flint's water crisis and the dangers of lead. Genesee Health Plan hosted "Water Update: What You Should Know" featuring a number of panelists including Dr. Mona Hannah-Attisha who was instrumental in helping gain attention for elevated blood lead levels in Flint children. "My every day is very much focused on what's next and what are we doing, what's in place and what's to come," Hannah-Attisha said. "Throughout this process I felt like I've become a...water expert."

Flint water crisis could lead to Blue Cross Blue Shield changes in Michigan

By AP for 95.3 MNC 09/08/16

The Flint water crisis could become a focus for a near-\$1.6 billion endowment created through the overhaul of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. The state Senate will vote Thursday on legislation adding "public health emergency" to specific purposes for which the Michigan Health Endowment Fund can spend money. A 2013 law modernizing Blue Cross requires it to contribute \$1.56 billion over 18 years.

Undocumented immigrants still face unique obstacles in Flint's water crisis.

By Grist 09/08/16

Back in January, Grist wrote about how people without papers in Flint weren't getting tested or treated for lead poisoning. Half a year later, it seems little has changed. Part of the problem is that the state of Michigan decided to rely on the federal Medicaid system to provide care for Flint residents, and Medicaid excludes some immigrants, according to reporting by Rewire. Those immigrants can supposedly still opt to use free clinics, but staffers at those clinics told Rewire's Tina Vasquez that they won't serve residents without state-issued identification. Add that to language barriers and other bureaucratic runarounds, and it seems clear that undocumented immigrants and people in mixed-status families are left with little to no options for healthcare in Flint.

Politics and Opinions

Democrats Are Fleeing From The Flint Crisis In Mass Drove

By Chris White, Daily Caller 09/09/16 2:21 PM

The spotlight on Flint is starting to ebb even as Michigan Democrats plead with the U.S. Senate to pass legislature giving the state \$100 million to use on the city's water crisis. The Water Resources Development Act of 2016, which was sponsored by GOP Sens. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma and California Democrat Barbara Boxer, cruised through the Environment and Public Works Committee by a 19-1 vote in late April, as publicity surrounding the crisis was at its peak.

How big data and algorithms are slashing the cost of fixing Flint's water crisis

By RAW Story 09/08/16 8:09 AM

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan highlights a number of serious problems: a public health outbreak, inadequate urban infrastructure, environmental injustice and political failures. But when it comes to recovery, the central challenge, and one that has received relatively little attention, is our lack of useful information and understanding. Who is most at risk? Where are the harmful sources of lead? Where should resources be allocated? Using modern big-data tools, we can answer these questions and help inform the response to this crisis.

The Conversation: Understanding Flint's Remaining Water Crisis Risks

By Jacob Abernethy & Eric Schwartz, Scientific American 09/08/16

The following essay is reprinted with permission from The Conversation, an online publication covering the latest research. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan highlights a number of serious problems: a public health outbreak, inadequate urban infrastructure, environmental injustice and political failures. But when it comes to recovery, the central challenge, and one that has received relatively little attention, is our lack of useful information and understanding.

DEQ spokesman who urged Flint to 'relax' lands new job

By Paul Egan, Detroit Free Press 09/06/16 11:21 PM

A former spokesman for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality who resigned over the Flint drinking water crisis has joined the Lansing lobbying corps. Brad Wurfel, who said last summer that Flint residents worried about lead contamination of their water should "relax," registered as a lobbyist in July and is working for the Lansing firm of Kandler Reed Khoury & Muchmore, records show.

Live in An Older Home? Milwaukee Mayor Recommends Water Filter to Remove Possible Lead

By Susan Bence, WUWM 09/08/16 [radio clip]

Mayor Tom Barrett made a surprise water announcement Wednesday saying anyone living in a home built before 1951 should install water filters to protect residents from possible lead poisoning. He issued the advice while taking part in a public policy conference at Marquette University Law School. Sitting on the same panel was Marc Edwards, a now famous environmental engineering professor from Virginia Tech. Edwards not only helped to spotlight Flint, Michigan's water crisis, but years earlier he investigated a public health disaster in Washington D.C. that ended with a Congressional investigation.

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